

Exercise of Collegiality

International College of the Teams of Our Lady – 2002 -

INTRODUCTION

In May 1993, when Responsibility in the Teams of Our Lady was defined¹, the International Leading Team (ERI) referred to “Collegiality” for the first time. Now, ten years later, at the meeting of the International College in Melbourne, Australia, in July 2002, it sought to deepen its practice in the light of experience at the international and regional level. This document has taken note of the comments of the members of the College, both during and since their meeting. It is, itself, an example of collegial work.

This document refers, in the first place, to collegial work within the International Leading Team and between it and the other members of the College, but it is also a guide for the practice of Collegiality at all levels of responsibility in the Movement.

Why is Collegiality important within the Teams of Our Lady? First of all because collegiality is more than a method: it is a state of mind that characterises the practices of our movement so that we may discern together the will of God. We already exercise this state of mind in our life as a Couple and as a Team.

The couple: We exercise it as a couple because Collegiality is to a great extent animated by a state of mind that aims at consensus. The couple seeks to fulfil the will of God in their actions, so as to live out, within their married communion, the love that unites them, a love founded on their sacrament of marriage and based on liberty, co-responsibility, listening to each other, fecundity, indissolubility and permanence. The visible evidence of seeking the will of God is found, inter alia, in their practice of Conjugal prayer and the ‘Sit-down’.

Team life necessarily entails the exercise of Collegiality in so far as we practise our founding charism: by meeting in Christ’s name, by spiritual and material mutual help, by accepting one another’s differences and by bearing witness to God’s love at the heart of human love².

ERI has many times considered Collegiality as being the Movement’s way of operating. At the meeting of the College in Dublin in 1995, it considered that it is the essential basis of its unity. It is a state of mind that infuses the whole of our Movement as well as our understanding of the mechanics of Collegiality.

This is what we will attempt to do by defining what Collegiality could be, as we consider its basis and the way it can be practised.

I. THE ROOTS OF COLLEGIALITY:

¹ “*Positions of Responsibility in the Teams of Our Lady*” - Paris, May 1993.

² Guide to the Teams of Our Lady

The Church invites our Movement to ask itself how it can proclaim Christ and his Gospel to couples at a time when we are more aware of being part of one humanity that is also marked by pluralism of languages, cultures and nations.

If the Gospel is to be heard by couples in all cultures, we must think of how we are to collaborate in the work of evangelisation. This collaboration is illustrated by the diversity of leaders in Teams gathered in the same search for unity.

As we seek out the roots of Collegiality, we can identify at least three main sources: juridical, ecclesial and Scriptural.

A) In juridical language

We find the term “*Collegialitas*” in the juridical language used in university and medical circles called to take joint decisions. In this context, Collegiality is the characteristic of a group authorised to take decisions (which may or may not be binding) within its competence in the society in which it operates.

B) In the official language of the Church

Section 22 of “*Lumen Gentium*” speaks of the College made up of the Pope, successor of Saint Peter, and by the bishops, successors of the Apostles. It is what we know as “collegiality” in the form of the “Apostolic College”.

“*Lumen Gentium*” makes the following points about the true meaning of collegiality:

- All Bishops, together, make up a College, a body, an order and this College is the successor of the College of the Apostles in the role of teaching and pastoral government of the Church; it is presided over by the Pope who is its head. In solidarity with the Pope and always with him, the College of Bishops exercise power over the whole Church.
- Bishops are legitimately ordained bishops by virtue of their sacramental consecration and of their hierarchical communion with the Head of the College and its members.
- The essential condition of Collegiality, in the fullest sense of the word, between the Pope and the other bishops is hierarchical communion with the Pope, since it is he who calls on the Bishops to take a collegial decision; or it is he who must accept and validate what these same bishops have decided together.

Section 23 speaks of the practice of Collegiality between bishops, that is to say, of what we call collegial solidarity or collegial spirit (in Latin, *affectus collegialis*).

The Collegiality between the Pope and the Bishops, that section 22 of *Lumen Gentium* speaks about, cannot be directly compared with the Collegiality between the member-couples of ERI nor with the Collegiality between the member-couples of the College ERI-SR.

The reason for this is obvious: the apostolic character of the Church means that it is structured on the basis of a hierarchical ministry, in the way that the College of the Apostles,

composed of Saint Peter and the other Apostles, was structured. On the other hand, as Teams of Our Lady, we are an association of the faithful in private law, recognised by the Church, composed of lay married people and governed by the principle that “what concerns all members must be decided by all members”.

All this leads us to look for the deep roots of our Collegiality in Scripture, our primary source.

C) In the language of Scripture

Although we do not find any explicit reference to the concept of Collegiality in biblical language, we can nevertheless turn to several texts that relate to the experience of community life. They allow us to draw closer to its concept with relative precision:

- **The sense of service**

It is clear in the language of the New Testament that Jesus does not highlight authority but stresses the sense of service: *“You know that among the pagans the rulers lord it over them, and their great men make their authority felt. This is not to happen among you. No; anyone who wants to be great among you must be your servant, and anyone who wants to be first among you must be your slave, just as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”* (Mt 20: 25-28). The Master gave us an example of this: *“You call me Master and Lord, and rightly; so I am. If I then, the Lord and Master, have washed your feet, you must wash each other’s feet. I have given you an example so that you may copy what I have done to you”.* (Jn 13: 13-15).

From all that has been said above flows the principle of “equality” between brothers and sisters in faith. This is why we must not speak of “power” but of “service”.

- **Unity between Christ and the Church**

Here is another clear principle: the unity of a community of faith is not achieved in itself but in Christ: *“I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever remains in me, with me in him, bears fruit in plenty; for cut off from me you can do nothing”.* (Jn 15: 5).

We are simultaneously the architects and the workers in the building of the Kingdom of God. *“Everyone doing the building must work carefully. For the foundation, nobody can lay any other than the one which has already been laid, that is Jesus Christ”.* (1 Co 3: 10-11).

And during the building, our duty as builders, is to remain united: *“Do all you can to preserve the unity of the Spirit by the peace that binds you together”.* (Ep 4: 3-4).

- **Charisms in the service of the community**

Although we are all equal before God, we are endowed with different charisms or talents ((Mt 25: 14-27), that are gifts from God: *“The particular way in which the Spirit is given to each person is for a good purpose. One may have the gift of preaching with wisdom given him by the Spirit; and another may have the gift of preaching instruction given him by the same*

Spirit; and another...All these are the work of one and the same Spirit who distributes different gifts to different people just as he chooses". (1 Co 12: 7-11). These gifts must be placed at the service of the community: "No one lights a lamp and puts it in some hidden place or under a tub, but on the lamp-stand so that people may see the light when they come in". (Lk 11: 33).

- **The prophetic role of Collegiality**

"You know how to read the face of the sky, but you cannot read the signs of the times". (Mt 16: 3). This is the prophetic role of every community of faith. As times change, one detects new circumstances, new needs, new opportunities, new challenges... and it is up to the community of faith to produce, through grace, new ways of exercising and practising Collegiality.

- **An example of Collegiality**

Finally, we find in the Acts of the Apostles (15: 1-34) a fine example of the exercise of Collegiality: It took place as a result of the visit to Antioch of *"some men [who] came down from Judea and taught the brothers: 'Unless you have yourselves circumcised in the tradition of Moses, you cannot be saved'. This led to disagreement, and ...it was arranged that Paul and Barnabas and others of the church should go up to Jerusalem and discuss the problem with the Apostles and elders"*.

"When they arrived in Jerusalem, ...the Apostles and elders met to look into the matter and after the discussion had gone on a long time. ...[they] decided, in agreement with the whole Church, to choose some among themselves and to send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas", with a letter that said: "It has been decided by the Holy Spirit and by ourselves not to saddle you with any burden beyond these essentials..."(Ac 15: 29).

Scripture here confirms the true meaning of collegiality, namely that it is the community united in the Spirit that decides, under His inspiration, what is most appropriate for the common good.

II. DEFINITION OF COLLEGIALITY

We arrive finally at the definition of Collegiality given in the document: "Positions of Responsibility in the Teams of Our Lady": *"Collegiality can be defined as the pooling together of various and complementary 'gifts' that the Spirit has given to each of us so that we may seek together the truth and a deeper union between ourselves"*³

Thus it is that the aim of Collegiality is to seek together the will of God for the Movement. It involves reflection, discussion, discernment and the search for consensus in a climate of trust, loyalty and co-responsibility between the members of the community.

³ "Positions of Responsibility in the Teams of Our Lady" - Paris, May 1993

III. BASIS OF COLLEGIALITY

What is common to all of us is our baptism through which the Holy Spirit acts in us. Furthermore, the Holy Spirit makes himself present in a group gathered in the name of Christ (Mt 18: 20). Bearing in mind this presence, we cannot act simply in a democratic way (rights and duties) within a team, but in an attitude of brotherhood, of seeking common ground, of communion. The Holy Spirit begets unity. If we seek the presence of the Holy Spirit in our team meetings, we shall not fail. Unity will become stronger among those who have prepared themselves to listen to the voice of the Spirit.

- **Leadership and collegiality**

These are two gifts given to our Movement since its beginning. This is why they must be exercised in such a way as to support and express the fact that couples and teams are part of the community of the Church.

This way of exercising leadership and collegiality implies the recognition and service of others, mutual respect, trust, openness and inter-communication between everyone. This is why, from the beginning, the Movement has set up Liaison Couples - and we are all Liaison Couples.

Liaison is an essential element of collegiality. It is essential in order to ensure that all aspects of a subject under consideration have been taken into account so that decisions are well understood and adopted by all. Our Movement must therefore ensure that liaison and collegiality are constantly maintained in balance so as to create true communion.

As Liaison Couples, we are seen as responsible for unity within Sectors, Regions, Super-Regions and the Movement as a whole. We are responsible for establishing links at all levels. This is why, Super-Regional, Regional and Sector Support Teams, as well as Service Teams (that we invite you to establish if they do not already exist), should be seen as modern instrument of collegiality through which our local structures can develop their particular characteristics, reflecting the diversity of couples who are meeting in Christ's name.

Nevertheless, let us remind ourselves that collegiality must be at the service of evangelisation and not an instrument for reducing everything to the lowest common denominator by playing down differences that are a source of riches. This is why we must now consider the principles and limits of collegiality.

The principles of collegiality

Equality

Since the beginning of the Teams of Our Lady, collegiality has been part of the way our Movement operates. Its obvious aims were good relationships and decision-making. Nevertheless it implies the presence, within the College, of couples called to a particular

service. This call, addressed to men and women, is a call from the Lord to serve. It confers the same rights and duties and thus establishes the essential conditions for true collegiality.

Transparency:

Because collegiality puts ideas to the test, it excludes those who want to exert power and who think that they have the right to do as they please. It encourages those with less experience to express their views freely and, in the context of the college, to debate in complete transparency.

Discussion

Collegiality works through discussion and reflection and not simply by a mere exchange of opinions and convictions. Those who have authority, either through personal charisma or through their seniority and knowledge can harm this process and are liable to overshadow the work of reflection, collegial discernment and the discussion.

Balance between authority and responsibility:

Just as, within collegiality, it is possible for some to monopolise authority, it is also possible to stifle responsibility. We have just seen how important it is for a balance to be struck between collegiality and responsibility. Excessive Collegiality can let itself be smothered in liaison and consultation and prevent the exercise of responsibility. This kind of management would then weaken the whole concept of service and availability.

The chain of collegiality

Another principle of collegiality is the need for a chain of collegiality. Collegiality must operate throughout the line of responsibility and service in the Movement. We cannot insist on the spirit of collegiality if we do not practise it ourselves. There must be a 'college' of Sector Couples in each Region, of Regional Couples in each Province, of Regional Couples and of leaders of Provinces in a Super-Region. Each level of responsibility must include a body in which discernment, transparency, reflection and decision take place.

IV. EXERCISE OF COLLEGIALITY

Collegiality can only survive if permanently practised in a way that incorporates a number of necessary elements:

Collegiality is more a state of mind and an attitude to develop than a method. It must entail:

- a common search for truth,
- seeking communion and consensus,
- the establishment of trust,
- a process for assuming responsibilities and making decisions,
- the acceptance of joint decisions without reservations.

A) A common search for truth

A common search for truth is an effort at understanding and carrying out the will of God for the Movement. It entails two essential stages:

- **A stage of collecting the data** necessary for the analysis of the problems and situations that face us, whatever service we are providing.

This supposes:

- that we express ourselves clearly and genuinely in total charity and fraternal correction,
- that every member of the College is attentive to the needs and expectations of team members and is therefore in permanent contact with them, either directly or through the structures of the Movement (liaison),
- that all of us together and in communion, feel responsible for the running of the Movement throughout the world (co-responsibility),
- humility and detachment: no one has exclusive possession of the truth and it is the good of team members that counts above all,
- that we know how to make the Movement benefit from our differences in our wealth of gifts, abilities and individual personalities.
- that diversity of temperament and mentality is, for us, an asset in looking fraternally at “the other”,
- that we are concerned only with the quality of our service to the exclusion of all power seeking,
- that we know how to stand aside from our membership of a particular country or culture in order to contribute its riches to the discussion and not our reticence.

- **A stage of genuine discernment**

The search for truth leads very naturally to the necessary discernment that must precede any decisions. We must therefore carry out a thorough evaluation in the light of the vocation and aims of the Movement. This discernment is only possible if we are intimately convinced that it is Jesus Christ who brings us together. This is why the normal high points in our life in the Teams of Our Lady must condition our life as a Support Team and as a College.

Adequate and necessary time must be allowed for good discernment, avoiding all pitfalls such as too long a discussion time that stretches the debate in an endless search for consensus, or too much impulsiveness that blurs some essential aspect of a decision.

We invite you to organise your meetings in such a way as to observe the following prime times as we will do, from now on, at our ERI meetings:

→ **Shared/quiet prayer**, through which we receive the gift of clear thinking to enable us to be good stewards and to manage for the best our “living and precious heritage” of the Teams of Our Lady

→ **‘Pooling’ (mise en commun) or sharing on life** so as to grow closer to our fellow team members and find out more about their sensitivities and way of life. We thus become able to practice fraternal correction and reinforce the spirit of love and of fraternal mutual help and understanding, all of which is essential to team life.

→ **Spiritual sharing** without which there can be no true unity in diversity and complementarity.

→ **A strong awareness of mission** based on formation, which is a condition for proclaiming the Gospel entrusted to us: the Gospel that we put into practice in serving couples and their families.

B) Seeking communion and consensus

Seeking communion means deepening ever more our mutual contacts. We must constantly seek communion and not uniformity. It is out of complementarity that communion is born. It does not mean either levelling or negating the unique character of each member of the College, of ERI or of any team.

- “Plurality must lead neither to division nor to juxtaposition but must give rise to and nourish reciprocity and co-ordination” (Christi Fideles Laici n° 20).
- Communion is therefore a responsibility and a grace given by the Lord and a duty entrusted to each one of us. Its growth can only be the fruit of the spirit and of our faithful and generous response to the Lord. *“Father, may they be one in us, as you are in me and I am in you, so that the world may believe it was you who sent me”* (Jn 17: 21).
- Communion leads to mission. This is why it is essential for us to participate in the new evangelisation.

The Church’s missionary nature starts with Christ and finds support in the Teaching Authority of the Church that aims at promoting communion by ensuring the unity of all the faithful in Christ. The Holy See agrees that the International Leading Team has received the mission of ensuring the unity of the Movement in Christ.

C) The establishment of trust

Establishing trust is the sine-qua-non condition for making real, shared and collegial decisions. Collegiality is different from democracy in that it relies on harmony. This is why it implies the will to choose together and reach a common decision. Trust depends on the certainty of sharing a common objective. Collegiality is based on trust. Without it, each member of a team checks the work of another. This state of permanent suspicion cannot be the method of working of a College, even exceptionally. On this subject of collegial work, we

would refer to pages 9 to 11 of the booklet “Positions of Responsibility in the Teams of Our Lady”.

Trust depends also on transparency in our work of reflection and in the positions we take up. This is why it seems essential to us that the International College should take carefully into account all the priorities agreed at its annual meetings. This requires a final and careful re-read of the minutes and of the decisions of the meetings of the College.

Super-Regions, Regions or Sectors linked to ERI are the special levels at which collegiality is practised in the spirit of communion with the Movement, in the context of the universal Church. It is the role of these levels of leadership to solve local problems of organisation, to choose and appoint new leaders and to animate the Movement.

Relationships between Regions, Super-Regions and Sectors must be characterised by fraternal collaboration and by a true pastoral solicitude, respecting the services and competence of every individual.

D) A process of co-responsibility and decisions-making

Is the mission of a Super-Regional or Regional Couple to be head of their respective entity, or is it, first and foremost, to be a member of the International College and of their Support Team (or ‘college’) and, as such, jointly responsible for the Movement and its unity?

The question of the role of leaders of teams, Sectors, Regions, Provinces and Super-Regions in relation to their team⁴ and to the Movement as a whole is therefore of concern to us. We must make a distinction between the outcome of the process of decision-making and leaders’ responsibility to carry out a decision taken ‘in college’.

→ Decision

The decision-making process must be understood as a work of reflection leading to a discussion and not as a mere exchange of opinions and convictions. A decision must be the result of a process of arguments and counter-arguments between several participants who, at a given moment, accept a point of view or a decision that can differ from their initial position.

Discussion is an exercise of reasoning that brings into play different and complementary rational arguments. It allows sufficient time to create a critical forum that provides the basis or justification for a proposed course of action.

“Starting from different approaches and even from different convictions, we must work together to find a consensus that unites us, one that we can accept because we feel that we have been involved in its development. This is particularly important for subjects that concern the deeper vocation and objectives of the Movement. What we seek in all cases is to agree with the will of God”⁵.

⁴ In the case of couples leading Sectors, Regions etc. , it would seem that ‘team’ indicates in this context their Support Team. (Translators)

⁵ “Positions of responsibility in the Teams of Our Lady” English edition Page 11.

If the principle of discussion is respected, it leads in all thoroughness to agreement among the members of the College taking part in the discussion. This agreement is called consensus. Consensus is the sought-after result, but its achievement must not, for all that, tame the discussion.

Consensus is not however a sufficient ethical principle if it is ill-founded. It can be – and this is its limitation – the expression of a group ideology: the fruit of the hierarchical or charismatic domination of one or several members of such a group. We must reject the idea that one individual can be right and everybody else wrong.

The time given to decision-making must allow the participants to stand back so as to understand all aspects of the situation, whether they are human, social or spiritual.

Discussion does not confer on the decision taken a certainty of absolute legitimacy. It confers however an element of seriousness and thoroughness that we cannot do without.

Because discussion requires taking into account the critical arguments of all participants, it is an absolute condition for the decision-making process to be carried out in a harmonious, collegial and precise way.

→ Responsibility

The exercise of responsibility is based on a sense of service and not on authority. It develops through the practice of collegiality. Nevertheless, the following points can clarify the role of the leading couple:

- a) Their first function, at all levels of the organisation, is to work as a team. To that end, the leading couple must endeavour to stimulate friendship and trust between all the members of the team. The ‘pooling’ (*mise en commun*) or sharing on life has been found to be a very useful tool for that purpose, but prayer is also indispensable, *“for without me, you can do nothing”* (Jn 15: 5).
- b) The leading couple must endeavour to discover and stimulate the particular gifts of each member of the team - whether couples or spiritual counsellor - whilst allowing each member to put his/her own capabilities at the service of the team.
- c) The animating role of the leading couple obliges them to stimulate the work of reflection through the study and discussion of the various matters that the team is dealing with. They must ensure the free expression of each team member’s ideas.
- d) The leading couple must act in all fraternal charity as a conciliator between members of the team whenever there are divergent positions between them, so as to work towards the achievement of consensus.
- e) When the collegial process cannot reach consensus and the team asks the leading couple to make the final decision, they must do so in heart and conscience in the name of leadership. They must make this decision prayerfully, in close union with the Spirit, and always in a spirit of service.

- f) All the variants and details of matters that affect our Movement cannot be decided collegially. *“It is also true that working collegially does not release the leading couple from their responsibility to take a final decision when the collegial procedure cannot reach a consensus”*⁶. Furthermore, there are other instances or matters - other than those that directly relate to the deeper vocation, the aims and formative way of the Movement - when the leading couple must exercise their role fully.
- g) Finally, *“Collegiality does not diminish the role of the leading couple. At each level of the organisation, they remain the visible sign of the unity of the team”*⁷.

E) Joint decision

A decision taken in the context of collegiality commits all members of the College who are responsible for making sure that it is implemented in the spirit and details that led to its adoption.

This implies that the decision should be clearly understood and that no one alters it in a way that would change its nature. Only local adaptations, within the scope of the decision, are possible provided they were foreseen and known.

Solidarity between all members of a college - and of the International College in particular - is essential since it is a guarantee of the spirit of service and mutual help that characterises our Movement.

No entity within the Movement can, without affecting the health of the whole body, change or take initiatives that undermine the organisation, the founding principles, the discipline or methods of the Teams of Our Lady

This calls, therefore, for perfect mutual loyalty. Such is the price of unity in our Movement, a unity that finds its source in the unity of our teams and of the College and therefore in the love that unites us: *“See, how they love one another!”*

F) Evaluation

For collegiality to be practised in a true spirit of service in keeping with the spirit of the Teams of Our Lady and faithfulness to it, it must be periodically evaluated by those who take part in it at every level of service.

This evaluation of collegial work could be carried out at each level of responsibility: Regional support team, Super-Regional support team, within the various Zones, the International Leading Team and the College.

⁶ “Positions of responsibility in the Teams of Our Lady” English edition Page 11.

⁷ “Positions of responsibility in the Teams of Our Lady” English edition Page 9.

CONCLUSION

Collegiality is a wonderful way of making the most of every member's gifts and to enhance our decisions through a work of reflection based on couples' living experience.

An organisation that does not bear fruits 'for others' and that works only for itself is useless. If our Movement is concerned only about itself, it forgets that it is at the service of something greater: a window through which we see God, an open space in which the Word of God is heard and where it becomes present in our organisation.

Collegiality properly exercised protects us from blindness to the problems of the world. It is a world full of suffering but also full of happiness that we must develop through the responsibilities we hold and through collegiality, so that the civilisation of love that Jesus Christ announced in his Gospel, may be built up.

The key to the success of this new evangelisation within our Movement, remains the spirit of collegiality through which team members, with responsibilities at all levels, work with holiness in view.

The Church and our Movement face immense challenges today that put to the test the confidence and enthusiasm of those who proclaim the Gospel. It is not only a question of numbers that reflect the fact that Christians are a minority, but of cultural changes dominated by lack of commitment.

Collegiality is one of the ways of involving the new generations of young leaders who are more open to and trained for this method of working. In this way, the call they will receive through us from the Lord, will help them to grow and help others to grow in total and radical commitment to the service of the Gospel.

We, Teams of Our Lady, have been experiencing TEAM LIFE since the first meeting on the 25th of February 1939 around and with Father CAFFAREL. Is this not the best testimony of the fruitfulness of collegiality?

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